

BONE CAVE
CLASS II NATURAL-SCIENTIFIC STATE NATURAL AREA

COUNTY: Van Buren

ACREAGE: 400 Acres

7.5' QUADRANGLE: Doyle

OWNERSHIP: State of Tennessee

PHYSIOGRAPHIC PROVINCE: Cumberland Plateau

YEAR DESIGNATED: 1974

DESCRIPTION: Big Bone Cave is a 400-acre natural area located in Warren County on the Eastern Highland Rim. It is named for the discovery of the bones of a giant ground sloth (*Megalonyx lacquetus* Harlan) in 1811. This skeleton, now on display at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, represents the only known specimen of a giant ground sloth with a complete pelvis. Also significant are the 1971 discoveries of the bones of an herbivore about the size of a bear, and other mammals including a jaguar (*Panthera onca augusta*). The cave also has historical significance as a salt peter mine during the War of 1812 and the Civil War, when as many as 300 miners mined the nitrate. The artifacts are remarkably well preserved in the dry cave and represent the state's best-preserved salt peter mining artifacts. Some of the artifacts that were once included but were lost to vandalism prior to state protection were wooden water pipes, faucets, elevated railways and catwalks, ore carts, hoppers, vats and ladders.

The land above the cave is mixed with woodland and areas of past farming, with evidence of past grazing activities. With 9.62 miles of passage, Big Bone Cave is the second longest mapped cave in Tennessee. An interesting feature includes Arch Cave, which is connected by an underground passage to Big Bone Cave. Much of the cave's geology is Monteagle limestone formation that is approximately 380 feet thick. The ridge above the cave is capped by Hartselle sandstone with various strata of formations beneath it. While Bone Cave is technically located on the eastern Highland Rim, it is considered an outlier of the Cumberland Plateau because of these formations. It is also recognized by the United States Department of Interior as a national natural landmark. It is one of only 14 national natural landmarks in Tennessee. These landmarks are recognized as the country's best remaining examples of major biotic communities and geologic features.

SITE MANAGEMENT: Rock Island State Park, 82 Beach Road, Rock Island, TN 38581, phone (931) 686-2471. Division of Natural Heritage, 401 Church Street, 14th Floor L&C Tower, Nashville, TN 37243-0447, phone (615) 532-0431.

PUBLIC ACCESS: Limited public access is provided. Public tours are available; contact Rock Island State Park.

DIRECTIONS: Rock Island State Park and Bone Cave State Natural Area are located between Sparta and McMinnville. To reach Rock Island State Park: take Hwy 70S to Hwy 136. Continue about 1 mile and turn left on Hwy 287 in Rock Island. Proceed for about three miles to the park entrance on the right.